


Spring 1999

## MSOP Newsletter (Spring/Summer 1999)

Maine Speakout Project

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# MSOP NEWSLETTER

SPRING / SUMMER 1999



**Box 15303, Portland, ME 04112-5303 • 207-879-0480 • [MSOPProject@aol.com](mailto:MSOPProject@aol.com)**

The mission of the Maine Speakout Project is to promote respect and understanding among persons of differing sexual orientations. To accomplish this mission, MSOP trains and empowers volunteers to share their personal experiences and perspectives with individuals and community groups.



# What's *Happening* Out There?

**Barbara Potter, Falmouth,  
Cumberland County**

**M**y partner, Mary Hillas, and I "spoke out" on the issue of Marriage at a fundraiser generously hosted by Lynn and Jim Shaffer in Cumberland in February. Although there have been a number of same-gender marriages in various Quaker Meetings and our own Portland Meeting welcomes such, we had until recently considered marriage a secondary issue to basic civil rights legislation. Let's not push our chances for the latter was our thinking as well as unconscious fears around marriage for ourselves which seemed like the ultimate "coming out."

However, in the last few months we have come to believe that the right to marry for gays and lesbians is right up there with basic civil rights. Jonathan's invitation to speak pushed us into further exploration on the issue. At the Shaffers we spoke not only of the many legal benefits, including financial ones, that accrue to married couple[s] of which we are deprived without expensive legal documents, but also of our 16 years of life together. We share families (including grandchildren), friends, a rich spiritual, sexual and emotional life as well as daily chores. We spoke of experiencing our life as a marriage, not a lifestyle.

Because any partnership presents us with challenges and struggles as well as blessings, we want the support for lesbians and gays that the institution of marriage bestows on a couple. It affirms publicly that we have the same enduring intimacy, commitments and qualities of love as do a happily matched heterosexual couple. By such honoring it legitimizes our relationships, encourages our

responsibilities to them. We noted that "ceremonies of commitment," however powerful they may be, are "separate, not equal."

Coming into adulthood in the late 1940s, it has taken me years to "come out" to myself and others. To speak publicly about the right to marry reawakened ancient terrors of exposure. At the same time, doing it that evening with a supportive audience has been part of my healing and no longer holding back. We were blessed to have Robert Taylor as the other speaker, telling of his life in the military and then of his committed 26 year relationship with his partner. The evening had a wonderful energizing finale with Darthe Jennings giving us her humorous and on target songs; she is a gifted musician and performer.

**Gracia Woodward, Bowdoinham,  
Sagadahoc County**

**T**he speaking engagement I did recently did not inspire me to any great thoughts or descriptions, but I would like to share an anecdote that I used in my story and will be using many times in the future. Fellow speakouters are welcome to quote me:

I read a story to my nine-year-old son about a boy who has two moms, just like my son does. At the end of the story, the boy says that other people expect that his family is different because of his moms being lesbians, but really they are a lot like other families.

So I asked my son, "Do you think our family is different from other families?" To understand his response, I have to tell you that

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE

we use a discipline system in our household where we give two warnings by counting "one...two..." and then send the culprit to time out on "three." So — I asked my son if our family is different from others. "Oh yes," he says very seriously. "How?" I ask. "We count," he says.

"Oh," I say. "Anything else?"

"Yes. We don't hunt."

I was completely charmed and amused. As you can see, my lesbian identity is not occupying a very significant role in my son's conception of his life — which is just as it should be at this stage.

**Claire Hebert, Lewiston,  
Androscoggin County**

I feel fortunate to be participating in Maine Speakout Project. For me it is a gift. Each engagement afforded me an opportunity to self reflect. Since being human is an evolutionary process, getting ready for a Speakout forces me to pause and ask myself some questions: what experiences

have shaped me, who am I now, how have I grown and changed, where am I going? In order to speak with clarity to others, I must be clear within myself.

Each Speakout affords me an opportunity to be stretched, to broaden my thinking. During the last engagement I was asked if discrimination against homosexuals was my primary focus or were my educational energies invested more widely on discrimination as a whole. I admitted that primarily I was focused on that which affects me the most. But I heard the challenge in the question: prejudice and discrimination hurts, no matter the reason.

Another asked how my daily is affected by the fear I experience as a Gay person. I responded that I strive not to live a compartmentalized life, to live honestly in all facets of my life. Yet, I told of meeting one of the women in the audience at the entrance to the meeting. Because I was standing by the registration table, she asked me a question pertaining to the meeting. With a friendly gesture I touched her arm, smiled, and informed her that I was waiting to go in as she was.

## MSOP COUNTY COORDINATORS

*For information on MSOP activities in your county, please contact one of the county coordinators listed below or the MSOP office @ 879-0480 / MSOPproject@aol.com.*

Androscoggin - Andie Locke @998-2890 / alocke@pivot.net  
 Aroostook - Cathy Bohls @768-3056 / cbohls@acap-me.org.  
 Cumberland - Doug Cruger @ 934-8160, Marby Payson @781-4769  
 Franklin - @ MSOP office  
 Hancock - Tamara Duff @667-5621  
 Kennebec - @ MSOP office  
 Knox - Lucie Bauer @236-4734 / lbak@mint.net  
 Oxford - @ MSOP office  
 Penobscot - Fern Stearns @827-3609 / Stearns@maine.maine.edu  
 Piscataquis - @ MSOP office  
 Waldo - Debbie Hockensmith @338-6677  
 Washington - Eilean Mackenzie @733-5537 / eilean@juno.com  
 York - Rosemary Guptill @324-4071



We both laughed a little and waited for the doors to open. As I stood there with her, I thought to myself: "Was I too friendly? Should I have touched her arm? Perhaps when she finds out I'm Gay, she may be offended by my touch." As I related my hidden self-talk to the audience, I could see heads nodding in sadness and understanding. I said to them, "When I lived in the world as a heterosexual, I would not have given my action a second thought."

After the meeting, the woman came to me and touched my arm in a gesture of friendliness and reassurance. There were about 30 people gathered for this meeting. They were welcoming and questioning. We engaged in conversation for about 40 minutes in active dialogue. It was good to be there.

**Sue Comyns, Portland,  
Cumberland County:  
Leading the Way:  
Schools for the 21st Century**

What a perfect setting for the unveiling of the 1999 *Maine Safe Schools Resource Guide* from the Maine Safe Schools Resource Collaborative!! We are from Maine Speakout, Outright, GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network) and PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and have made a commitment to helping Maine schools become safe places where every family can belong, where every educator can teach and where every child can learn, regardless of sexual orientation.

Three of us, Jonathan Lee, Rita Clifford and myself were presenters at the Maine Education Association's 2nd Annual Professional Practices conference on April 10 at the Samoset Resort in Rockport, Maine. There were twenty-two participants in our session who were noticeably moved by our stories — mine about my now 24 year old gay son who came out to me at age 19 but who "knew" when he was eight or nine. I shared how invisible he was through middle and high school and how I naively wondered why he wasn't going to the Prom!!

These educators, support staff, bus drivers shared their experiences with students and staff who were "different," sometimes telling their own tender stories. Together we brainstormed how we could impact today's students, often referring to our "hot-off-the-press" *Resource Guide*. Two participants came to me at the end of the presentations, one who's brother had died of AIDS and had not shared his homosexuality and another who thought her 20 year old son might be gay...what should she do? say? That's why I do this work.

**Robert Taylor, Blue Hill,  
Hancock County:  
Deer Isle Speakout**

The First Congregation Church of Deer Isle is in the process of deciding how "open and affirming" the church will be to homosexuals. A Christian Education Subcommittee called "Our Church and Homosexuality," which has been meeting for more than a year, has prepared a statement that says "God has included in his redemptive revelation through our Lord, Jesus Christ, all human beings without exception. Therefore, any contempt or discrimination against people who are born as homosexuals is against the will of God and has no place in the church."

On January 11, the Subcommittee sponsored a Speakout presentation to which both church members and the community at large were invited. An enthusiastic, receptive crowd of more than sixty persons attended. Three Speakout volunteers — Carol Bult of Mt. Desert Island, Robert Taylor of Blue Hill, and Tamara Duff of Ellsworth, Speakout's Hancock County coordinator — talked about their experiences and then answered questions from the audience.

Bult told of growing up afraid to acknowledge the truth of her sexuality, fearing the rejection of her fundamentalist Christian parents and believing herself there was something "profoundly morally wrong" with her. She lived her life in separate compartments

until she went away to college and discovered there were others like her in the world. The Deer Isle Speakout, she said, was the first time she had ever discussed her sexuality in public.

I talked about the rewards of having lived openly with another man for 24 years. I said I realized how lucky I and y partner were to have been accepted by pour parents and siblings, though I am certain that the willingness, and the courage to be honest ourselves made was what made that acceptance possible. I asked the audience to "create for the gay men and women in your community, especially the young, not just tolerance but real respect and understanding."

Duff spoke from the point of view of a straight person who has seen how difficult it has been for her brother and her son to live as homosexuals. She said she had hoped that it would be easier for her son to grow up gay in the 1990s than it had been for her brother in the 1970s, but she learned to her sorrow that things were not so different after all. "The reason I do this work," she said, "is because I have three grandchildren, and when they grow up, I want them to be really OK."

Questions from the audience and answers from the Speakout volunteers went on for more than an hour after the presentations. About halfway through, the church's moderator rose to say that anyone in the audience who felt it necessary to leave should feel free to do so. No one left."

**Tamara Duff, Ellsworth,  
Hancock County**

I feel very optimistic about Speakout for 1999 in our county. We've had several speakouts so far and more are in the works.

In January I did two church services with Mac Bigelow in Seal and Northeast Harbors. I was part of the service to introduce Speakout to the congregations. It was a little scary being the sermon for the day, but I

was soon at ease. Mac's prayers, readings, story of the good Samaritan for the children, and beautiful music all blended so well to create the message of the day: Who is our neighbor? The Golden Rule and what that means, and the responsibility of people of faith to equality and justice for all of us.

Mac's churches are very welcoming and are hoping to work on drafting their own open and affirming statements. We hope to have further dialogues with these churches.

The very next night we did a community speakout at the Deer Isle Congregational Church. Though the churches in Deer Isle and Stonington have been working on an open and affirming statement, this was very much an all community gathering. More than sixty joined us for a very lively evening of sharing stories and lots of questions.

I find that I'm taught and encouraged so much by the people I encounter at our speakouts. Each time there is a little more understanding, a little less fear, and more misinformation corrected. With me at Deer Isle were Carol Bult and Robert Taylor.

This good feeling continued at our gathering at College of the Atlantic in February. Lin Gould and Phil Gray were my co-speakers that day. We met with a group of students, faculty, and staff. Again a very supportive and interested audience. Hopefully from one to another information and understanding is shared and passed on.

In early April, we had an exciting dialogue with the Bucksport Police Department. Again Lin and Phil were my co-speakers. We were part of a day-long training for the police officers. They were interested and engaged, asking many questions related to the work they do. I'm very encouraged that this will lead to further work with the police and other departments that work with our communities.

We have accomplished much already this year and I want to thank all the dedicated and dynamic speakers in our county.



# How Can You Help?

**M**aine Speakout has grown steadily in our four-year history and now, with **America Speaks Out**, we have the potential to make a significant national contribution. We need your continued financial support to sustain our work and hope you will encourage your friends and family to support us, too.

If you live in Maine, one valuable way to help MSOP broaden our base of support and accomplish our educational mission simultaneously is by encouraging your employer to offer MaineShare as a workplace giving option along side of the United Way. MSOP was admitted as a MaineShare recipient organization a year ago and this has helped us to receive support and to reach employees through workplace presentations. See the notice below for what you can do to make MaineShare a charitable option at your job.

## Support Maine Speakout through payroll deduction!

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# MaineShare

*MaineShare funds 30  
statewide organizations  
addressing issues  
that concern you.*



***Enroll your workplace for the 1999 campaign online  
at [www.maineshare.org](http://www.maineshare.org) or contact us directly.***

**P.O. Box 2095, Augusta, ME 04338  
(207) 622-0105    [meshare@ctel.net](mailto:meshare@ctel.net)**



*Another way to support our work: donate stocks through our A.G.  
Edwards Brokerage Gift Account # 210-260064.*

*Call 800-424-4452 for more information.*

*Or you can help by taking out an ad in our Pride '99 program book. See  
below for more information.*



## ***Be a Proud Sponsor!***

On Friday, June 18 from 7-9 at the State Street Church, the Maine Speakout Project will present a CD-release Concert featuring singer-songwriter DARTHE JENNINGS from Columbia Falls, Washington County. Ms. Jennings is a gifted writer/performer who has just recorded her first CD.

On Sunday, June 20, 1999 — Father's Day as well as the final day of Gay Pride weekend in Portland — Maine Speakout Project will sponsor its second annual **"Walk with the One You Love"** at Back Cove walkway.

Gay and non-gay people will walk together as an act of solidarity and community-building. The Walk will begin at Back Cove at 4 pm with a few couples offering brief statements about why they are walking. Then the walk will proceed to Payson Park where it will end about 5 pm with free refreshments for all.

We are inviting you to help sponsor these two Pride events. In this way you can help support the educational work of Maine Speakout Project throughout Maine to make our schools, churches, workplaces, and public spaces safe places for all of us, regardless of sexual orientation.

All Contributors will be acknowledged in our Pride Program. Sponsors and Underwriters will receive public recognition in all concert and event publicity and a full page in the program.

**Please return by June 11th.**

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Yes, I/we will make a tax-deductible donation to support the Maine Speakout Project's Pride '99 Events.

\_\_\_\_ Enclosed is a check for: \$\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_ Enclosed is a business card or camera-ready ad.

**Yes, I would like to be a:**

- ☐ **\$1,000 Underwriter**  
☐ **\$500 Major Sponsor**  
☐ **\$250 Sponsor**

**AD SIZES:**

- \$200 full page (5"x 8")**  
**\$100 half-page (5" x 4")**  
**\$50 quarter-page (5"x2")**  
**\$25 1/8 page or business card (3.375" x2")**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/Fax/Email \_\_\_\_\_



# Walk With the One You Love

## BECAUSE....



If you're gay or lesbian, you cannot take for granted the simple pleasure of walking in public with the one you love. You are afraid of being stared at, called names, or physically attacked. Heterosexuals take this simple pleasure for granted.



If you're heterosexual and decide to marry the one you love, you are free to do so. If you're gay or lesbian and want to marry the one you love, you will find that the state of Maine denies you that right. Why?



Many heterosexuals want gay and lesbian Mainers to have the same rights and responsibilities as they do. They want our laws to support committed relationships between all couples, regardless of sexual orientation, and they want gay and lesbian individuals to feel safe walking in public with the one they love.



By walking together, we seek to affirm the value and dignity of all of our families and that we all deserve the right to WALK WITH THE ONE WE LOVE in our community without fear.



**SUNDAY, JUNE 20, 4-5 pm**  
**Back Cove Walkway - Payson Park.**

**All are Welcome!**

*For more information call 879-0480.*

# Executive REPORT



## *Executive Director's Update*

Our volunteers are speaking in a wide variety of local venues, including the YWCA of northern York County, health education classes at Portland High School, Lisbon Rotary, Great Falls Forum in Lewiston, Union Church of Northeast Harbor, Catholic Charities program managers in Orono, Hampden Academy Diversity Day, Bucksport Police, Waldo Regional Vocational Center, University of Maine/Fort Kent, and the University of Maine/Machias. The reports we receive from speakers and audience members continue to be very positive.

Since December, we've trained new speakers in Kennebunk and Augusta; held Safe Schools workshops in Bangor and Augusta led by Peter Rees of Ellsworth; and new trainings are scheduled for Aroostook County in June and Portland later in the summer.

## *Speaking Out to Make Our Schools Safe*

The Maine Safe Schools Resource Collaborative, of which Speakout is a member, has just published the first edition of the *Maine Safe Schools Resource Guide*. This booklet contains very useful policy recommendations, suggested curricular materials, and information listed by county on resources and groups available to help schools become safe places for sexual minority students, staff, and families.

The organizations comprising this collaborative are Outright, which works with glbt and questioning youth, GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network)/Southern Maine, PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and MSOP. We, along with other groups listed in the *Resource Guide*, are prepared to offer staff training to teachers and administrators in

public schools on safe schools issues. Speakout volunteers will be among those participating in Safe Schools teams that make these presentations.

To help move this concern onto the agenda of school leaders, we have been making presentations at statewide conferences: the Maine School Counseling Association, the Maine Education Association Professional Practices Conference, the Maine Counseling Association, and the Maine Leadership Consortium, an organization that includes the elected leaders of the principals, teachers, and superintendents.

We have sent two copies of the *Maine Safe Schools Resource Guide* to every principal and superintendent in Maine with a letter from Education Commissioner J. Duke Albanese in which he writes that "our teachers need staff development opportunities to help them learn how to intervene in anti-gay bullying and how to create a school climate that is experienced as safe by all...The *Maine Safe Schools Resource Guide* can help you and your staff to take constructive actions to help you meet your responsibility to ensure that your school is safe for everyone."

Special thanks to Commissioner Melodie Peet of the State Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services for funding this first project of the Maine Safe Schools Resource Collaborative.

## *Reclaiming Our Faith*

Speaking out in religious congregations continues to be a high priority for MSOP and we are pleased to be in a partnership with the Maine Council of Churches to promote dialogue in Maine congregations. Following the September "Reclaiming Our



Faith" conferences in Lewiston and Somesville, we are organizing smaller, regional gatherings for people of faith: in Camden, Machias, Dover-Foxcroft, Aroostook County. In a recent press release, Maine Council of Churches director Tom Ewell said: "I am convinced that the person-to-person approach of Maine Speakout Project provides the most effective approach to address the societal prejudice against gay and lesbian people."

## America Speaks Out!

We have exciting news to report regarding our initiative to promote and assist in the development of statewide speakout programs in the rest of the country, "America Speaks Out." Two new Speakout Projects have been formed: SpeakOut Arizona, based in Tucson, and Georgia Speakout, based in Atlanta. We provided initial trainings of volunteers and trainers in Arizona in March and in Georgia in April. They have appointed their first executive directors, Kip Leyser in Arizona and Sally Lowe Whitehead in Georgia and are beginning to schedule speakouts, trainings, and fundraising efforts.

These projects can make important contributions towards changing the climate of opinion in communities throughout Arizona and Georgia. Should you have friends in Arizona or Georgia who might be interested in getting involved with these new projects, they can contact them at:



**SpeakOut Arizona Project**  
5350 Paseo de la Perea  
Tucson, AZ 85750  
Phone: 520-577-0075  
email: DesertKey@aol.com

**Georgia Speakout Project**  
512 Calhoun Street N.W.  
Atlanta, GA 30318  
Phone: 404-872-1310  
email: slwhead@mindspring.com.



These two projects need to raise \$50,000 for their first year and would welcome your support at this formative moment.

## Board/Staff Transitions

In this age of mobility, we've lost another one: John Buie, who was our board president, has moved to Phoenix, Arizona. It is some consolation that John will remain on the Speakout board and will be a participant in SpeakOut Arizona.

Replacing John Buie as MSOP board president is Matt Howe, executive director of MaineShare. Matt has ably served us as treasurer, a position that will be taken on by Neva Cram. We are very pleased to welcome Kate Neale and Bill Dickinson, each of Portland, to our board. They both have a lot to offer and we appreciate their willingness to serve.

Ron Hersom, who in November was hired half-time as our Coordinator for Northern Maine has become our full-time coordinator for the entire state. He is helping to generate speaking engagements for all the Speakout chapters, working to organize new chapters, and pitching in everywhere. We've welcomed him once; now, we welcome him again!

## A Message from Ron Hersom,

### MSOP Venues Coordinator:

I am very pleased and excited to be working for all the counties in Maine getting venues for Speakout. Please feel free to contact me anytime that is convenient for you, if you have questions, needs or concerns.

As volunteers across the state of Maine, you are our foundation, our grounding and our networking to the wider communities where we live and work. With the challenge before us, your commitment and support makes the job easier. I look forward to working with each of you as we continue this journey.

Phone: 941-0969;  
Fax: 262-9502;  
email: RHersom@aol.com.



# Thank You:

**Jim and Lynn Shaffer** for hosting on February 26 a speakout reception at their home in Cumberland where Darthe Jennings performed her wonderful songs, and Mary Hillas, Barbie Potter and Robert Taylor did speakouts.

**Darthe Jennings** of Columbia Falls, Washington County for, once again, bringing us wit, pleasure, common sense, and entertainment through performing her songs at the Shaffer's party.

**Robert Taylor** of Blue Hill for reading on February 27 at the Charlie Howard Memorial Library from his novel *The Innocent* and his forthcoming novel, *A Few Hints and Clews*.

**Sunnie and George Silverman** for hosting a chamber music recital at their Portland home on April 13. The concert was organized by cellist (and MSOP board member) Elliott Cherry, who performed beautiful music beautifully along with Michael Albert, Christina Astrachan, Mary Jo Carlsen and Ray Cornils.

**Michael Denneny** of St. Martin's Press for donating a number of books to our library, including the path breaking *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* by Bruce Bagemihl. Author Lillian Faderman writes about this book that "the massive evidence of the wondrous complexity of sexuality in the natural world that Bagemihl has marshaled will inform, entertain, and persuade academic and lay readers alike. *Biological Exuberance* is a revolutionary work."

**Barry Rosen** for hosting our May 19th **America Speaks Out** event at the Dale Chihuly warehouse in SoHo, New York City.

**Restaurant Florent**, 69 Gansevoort Street and **Mary's**, 42 Bedford Street, for donating delicious appetizers for our May 19

event. Both of these fine, community-spirited restaurants deserve your business.

**Sally Lowe Whitehead** of Atlanta, **Jane Doherty** of Tucson, and **Gerry Clement** of Falmouth for making the trip to New York to speak at the 5/19 event.

**Barbara Potter** of Falmouth for donating a new video of the movie "Priest" to the Charlie Howard Library.

**The Kenduskeag Foundation** of Portland and **the Gill Foundation** of Colorado for their recent grants of \$5,000 to MSOP.

## Pride '99

You can look forward to these upcoming events: on Monday, June 7 from 7-8 pm, on Cable 4 in Portland, author E.J. Graff will talk about her new book, *What is Marriage For?*, Beacon Press, 1999. MSOP volunteers will join her to talk about what marriage means to them and answer questions on this live call-in show.

On Friday, June 18th from 7-9 pm, Darthe Jennings will give a CD-release concert at the State Street Church on Gay Pride weekend. Darthe has traveled all over Maine sharing her music at Speakout events and we are very pleased to feature her at this benefit concert for MSOP. Tickets are \$10 and for reservations, call 879-0480.

Sunday, June 20, from 4-5 pm, Speakout will hold our second annual **"Walk with the One You Love"** to promote greater awareness about our concern for safety in public and as a way of showing solidarity between gay and non-gay people. Single, married, gay, straight, coupled or looking for your other half, all are welcome!

# Upcoming Events



7 Dana Street  
Portland, Maine 04101  
Tel. (207) 879-0480

## June 7

Monday from 7-8 pm, on Cable 4 in Portland, author E.J. Graff will talk about her new book, *What is Marriage For?*, Beacon Press, 1999. MSOP volunteers will join her to talk about what marriage means to them and answer questions on this live call-in show.

## June 12

Saturday, United Methodist Church, Dover-Foxcroft, **Reclaiming Our Faith**, 1-5 pm.

## June 18

Friday, State Street Church, Portland, **Darthe Jennings CD-release Concert to benefit MSOP**, 7 pm. CD-release concert at the State Street Church on Gay Pride weekend. Darthe has traveled all over Maine sharing her music at Speakout events. Tickets are \$10. For reservations, call 879-0480.

## June 19

Saturday, Presque Isle, **Speakers Training**, 9-5 pm.

## June 20

Sunday, Father's Day, **Walk with the One You Love**, Back Cove walkway -Payson Park, Portland, 4-5 pm.

## July 17

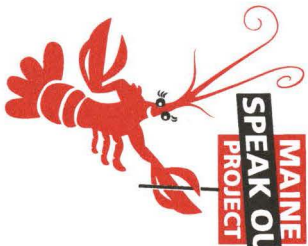
Saturday, College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, **Reception for MSOP**, 5:30pm

*Don't miss these upcoming events...tear this page out  
and keep it near your calendar!*









**Maine Speakout Project**  
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